





# Abraham Lincoln and Religion

## Little Mount Church Kentucky

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



# Little Mount Church,

William Cassma gave land for church

Logs of Little Mt Church now in barn of Bill Howe

One mile from Little Mount RFD #3  
Wild woods. Help from the family

John Duncan preached at Little Mount 15 years.

Little Mount blown down in 1909

John Jones Stable built from Little Mount church

George Thomas took the logs in payment for work  
and then sold to Jones.

They baptised near Spurr Walters. 3rd Sunday  
baptised 50 people.



of January 25, 1795 reads as follows: "Brother Carmen is about to remove his residence from the bounds of this church and requests a letter of dismissal."<sup>12</sup> Because of his intense feeling on the slavery question he removed to Ohio. There he could preach in a State where no issue was raised on the question of slavery.<sup>13</sup>

This old pioneer undoubtedly exerted a great influence over the communities where he labored, and in each of his churches men were raised up to carry on the slavery agitation. Abraham Lincoln, Sr., had probably heard him preach near the Long Run home as early as 1783. Thomas Lincoln had undoubtedly heard him at Lick Creek and other Baptist churches near the Washington County home. When he and Nancy moved to Elizabethtown in 1806 the influence of Joshua Carmen was still felt, and especially among the group that worshiped on Nolin near the home where Abraham Lincoln was born.

Two preachers that directly influenced the Lincolns more than any others were William Downs and David Elkin. They were strong emancipators, and the boy Abraham heard both of them preach. Outside of the Lincoln family, those that had a direct antislavery influence on the child Abraham Lincoln in Kentucky were these preachers and the school-teacher, Caleb Hazel.

#### CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Not only did the church start the discussion on the slavery question but it continued to follow up the agitation with a consistent effort toward abolition.

The Rolling Fork Baptist Church was the organization that took the initiative in the slavery controversy. In 1789 it sent this query to the Salem Association: "Is it lawful for a member of Christ's Church to keep his fellow creatures in perpetual slavery?"<sup>14</sup> Because the association refused to consider the question, the church withdrew.<sup>15</sup> The Rolling Fork Church was not more than five miles from the Knob Creek home of the Lincolns.

The Severns Valley Church had been the seat of slavery controversy for nearly twenty years before the arrival of the Lincolns in Elizabethtown in 1806.

As early as January 23, 1796, this question was up for discussion in the church: "Quare, is slavery oppression or not?" The result of the debate is stated in these words: "The quare being taken up was answered in the affirmative, it was oppression." The following month another entry on the minute-book suggests further agitation of the same question: "Quare, can we as a Church have a fellowship with those that hold the righteousness of perpetual slavery, it was answered in the affirmative, they could not." Two months later the church tried to make such rules as would allow those already having slaves to retain them under certain conditions and also spoke with decision as to the attitude to be taken toward an unruly slave. On July 23, 1796, "Secer, a black man belonging to Bro. James Minihan is received by relation (to all the privileges of this church)." A line is drawn through that part of the sentence inclosed in parentheses. Several other slaves were received after this, and they were held to strict discipline.<sup>16</sup>

The South Fork Baptist Church, which served the next community into which the Lincolns moved, had been split wide open by the slavery controversy. Another church had been formed known as Little Mount, which was an Emancipation church of the Separate Baptist order.

Two actions taken by the church in 1806 evidently stirred up agitation about the status of the negro. In June we find "Brother David excluded from running away from his master." In August two members of the church acknowledged "tying up a man and whipping him." In November, 1807, Brother Sam was excluded. In December of the same year the preacher declared he was for emancipation and offered his resignation. We are not informed as to the course which the church took, but on July 3, 1808, fifteen members "went off from the church on account of slavery." From this date until the first Saturday in July, 1810, the church failed to transact any business. It was during this period that Abraham Lincoln was born. It appears from the records that the antislavery group were finally victorious, because on Saturday, December 4, 1812, some of those who had withdrawn on account of slavery returned and were received back into the church.<sup>17</sup>

We are sure that the Lincolns had not affiliated with the South Fork Church during the two years they lived at the birthplace farm, as the church was in no condition to receive members. When they moved to Knob Creek they found themselves in another community in which the majority of the citizens belonged to the Little Mount organization. This was the church which the emancipation group from South Fork had formed, and



THE MOUTH OF KNOB CREEK  
On the ferry at this point Abraham Lincoln saw the slaves of Peter Atherton at work



this is the Kentucky church, we feel quite sure, of which Thomas and Nancy Lincoln were members.

After reviewing the attitude of these churches toward emancipation one is convinced that Thomas Lincoln had heard discussed, pro and con, the question of slavery. From every indication it was the one big problem with which the church was wrestling at this period of Thomas Lincoln's residence in Hardin County, Kentucky. As to whether or not he enjoyed this continual wrangling we may draw our own conclusion.

It may be said that Abraham Lincoln was born in an atmosphere charged with the slavery controversy. It is impossible to conceive of a more tense community situation than that existing in the South Fork neighborhood relative to slavery during the period when the Lincolns lived there. Many biographers, however, have dismissed the early environment of Abraham and the Kentucky experiences of his parents as having no bearing on the attitude of the president toward slavery. They treat the statement of Abraham Lincoln himself, in which he affirms that his father moved from Kentucky "partly on account of slavery," as a bit of political propaganda; Lamont actually accuses Lincoln of lying, holding that "nothing could be further from the truth than this." He offers as evidence of this alleged prevarication of Lincoln's that "There were not at that time more than fifty slaves in the county."<sup>18</sup>

When Thomas and Nancy Lincoln moved to Indiana in 1816, the date to which Lamont refers, the commissioners' books of Hardin County reveal that taxes were being paid on 1238 slaves within the county limits.<sup>19</sup>

There were more than a thousand slaves listed in 1811, and one slaveholder alone in the county listed fifty-three slaves this same year.<sup>20</sup>

#### REMOVAL TO A FREE STATE

The time of the Lincoln migration from a slave to a free State is suggested by the testimony of Abraham Lincoln himself and verified by the public documents. The earliest date suggested for the removal is sponsored by J. Edward Murr, who asserts that Abraham Lincoln was a child seven years and four months old when Indiana received him. This would place the arrival in June, 1816.<sup>21</sup> This date is at least five months too early. Thomas Lincoln was still in Kentucky on November 11, 1816, when he appeared before a justice of the peace in Nelson County and made oath to a bill in a suit. This record we believe to be the last evidence of the Lincoln family in Kentucky.<sup>22</sup>

The latest date suggested for the exodus of the family is November, 1817. J. Rogers Gore is the authority here, and he is a whole year too late.<sup>23</sup> We are positive that the Lincolns left Kentucky at some time previous to December 20, 1816, as a suit against Thomas was then brought on the strength of his removal.<sup>24</sup> An indorsement on one of the papers filed in the Lincoln ejectment suit also affirms that "the Lincolns moved off the place in the fall of 1816."<sup>25</sup> We are now able to conclude that the departure from Kentucky took place between November 11, 1816, and December 20, 1816. If Thomas

remained for the sale of the South Fork farm, which was sold by a commissioner on December 16, we may place the date of his departure during one of the three succeeding days.

The story of the migration is sometimes told in three parts: the prospecting trip, the river trip, and the overland trip. The first has a strong exponent in J. Edward Murr, who asserts that Thomas Lincoln was on a visit to his brother Josiah in Harrison County, Indiana, when he decided to locate in the free State.<sup>26</sup>

The river trip was evidently first put forward by William M. Thayer in "The Pioneer Boy," published in 1863.<sup>27</sup> We have yet to find an author who has questioned its authenticity, and even the latest works on Lincoln treat it as an established fact. We can find nothing to support it and much that contradicts it. It seems to have been written as a sequel to the sale of the Knob Creek farm, which made it necessary to move ten barrels of whisky to Indiana. The sale of the farm for whisky has been shown to be pure fiction.<sup>28</sup> With no barrels of whisky to transport, we have no need of a raft, and no call for a river trip. Thus the removal becomes a story of one part. The tradition that the Hankses were responsible for the Indiana migration of the family is held by some of the descendants of William and Joseph Hanks. It is my own conviction that the widow and orphan children of Hananiah Lincoln, who were then living in the community which became Spencer County, were more directly responsible for the location of Thomas Lincoln's Indiana home than either the family of Josiah Lincoln or the Hankses.

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